TURNING THE TIDE ON CORAL REEF DECLINE

Not very long ago, coral reefs were considered to be relatively stable and healthy in Kuna-Yala, Caribbean Panama. Between 1970 and 2001, however, the reefs declined by 79 percent, while the indigenous population of the Kuna people increased by 62 percent. Coral mining, mismanagement of other natural resources, and land-filling practices to accommodate population growth have significantly compromised the reef ecosystem and will have serious long-term consequences. Natural disturbances have also accelerated the demise of the reefs, with coastal erosion increasing as a result of the lack of a protective natural barrier and a 2.0 centimeter yearly rise in local sea level.

In the October issue of Conservation Biology, Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute staff scientist Héctor Guzmán and colleagues propose eight priority conservation areas within the Kuna reserve (17: 1396-1401. 2003). Based on these results, the Kuna people and their leaders are considering a cultural change, which may include a gradual and organized migration to the mainland, and have optimistically accepted these scientists’ proposal.

BLACK-FOOTED FERRETS: LOST AND FOUND

North America’s only native ferret once inhabited the Great Plains from Canada into northern Mexico, preying almost exclusively on prairie dogs. When prairie dogs were declared a pest species because they competed with livestock for forage, an effective extermination campaign decimated them and their principal predator—the black-footed ferret.

During the 1980s, the Wyoming Fish and Game Department (WFGD) sent some newly discovered black-footed ferrets to selected breeding facilities, including the National Zoo’s Conservation and Research Center (CRC), whose staff had developed and mastered artificial insemination techniques that could increase ferret populations and maintain vital genetic diversity. Their breeding successes led to the release of 49 ferrets into Wyoming’s Shirley Basin in October 1991, that were believed to have been wiped out by sylvatic plague three years later. Despite this setback, over the next twelve years, more than 1,600 black-footed ferrets were released onto seven sites in the Great Plains, with 90 of the animals released provided by CRC.

In August 2003, a WFGD biologist found a surviving group of about 40 ferrets some distance from the original 1991 release site. DNA analysis found that the population was inbred, confirming assumptions that the original population in Wyoming was drastically reduced by plague and remained at low numbers for many generations. CRC scientists were extremely gratified that not only has their hard work paid off with the success of more recent reintroductions, but that all along, the initial release in 1991 had actually been a twelve-year success. This discovery bodes well for the future of the tough little black-footed ferret on the Great Plains.

INFORMATION HIGHWAY HI-LITES

Three years into the most extensive biological inventory ever attempted, scientists working on the Census of Marine Life (CoML) (<http://www.coml.org>) have already found over 200,000 marine species—just a fraction of what they expect to find at the end of this 10-year project. The CoML Web site “is designed to provide quick and easy access the all elements of the CoML and basic information about each element,” including field project over-
views and reports, timely news articles, and other resources. Readers will also find the recently released “Baseline Report of the Census of Marine Life 2003” and a draft plan outlining the next 7 years. The site also includes fantastic photos of newly described species, QuickTime movies from the field, and other features.

- from the NSDL Scout Report for the Life Sciences

The Southeastern Rare Plant Information Network (SERPIN) <http://www.serpin.org/> is a joint project of the State Botanical Garden of Georgia and Duke University Biological and Experimental Science Library. SERPIN “aims to make large and small museum and library collections more easily available to researchers, teachers, students, land managers, and the public in the Southeast and worldwide.” The SERPIN database currently includes botanical data, literature, and many other resources for all state or federally listed plants found in Georgia, north and central Florida, and the Carolinas.

- from the NSDL Scout Report for the Life Sciences

**Current Literature**


Burnett, C., Fall, A., Tomppo, E., and Kalliola, R. 2003. Monitoring current status of and trends in boreal forest land use in...


Walters, B.B. 2003. People and mangroves in the Philippines:
The Biological Conservation Newsletter is a monthly publication provided free of charge. If you would like to be added to the mailing list, contact Dr. Gary Krupnick, Department of Systematic Biology - Botany, Smithsonian Institution, PO Box 37012, NMNH MRC-166, Washington DC 20013-7012, or send e-mail to krupnick.gary@nmnh.si.edu. You may also subscribe to receive e-mail notification when new issues are posted to the web. Send an e-mail message to listserv@si-listserv.si.edu containing only the following text: “SUBSCRIBE BCN FIRSTNAME LASTNAME”. For more information, go to the web page http://rathbun.si.edu/bcn.

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